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THE MONTHLY GULL BULLETIN

AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

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MARCH MEETING: The next regular meeting of the Association will be held on Thursday evening, 10th inst., at eight o'clock, in the Lecture Hall of the California Development Board, mezzanine floor of the Ferry Building.

Dr. H. C. Bryant, Honorary Member of the Association, will deliver a lecture on "Hawks, and Their Field Identification." Dr. Bryant has been gathering data upon this subject for a long time, and our field-faring members will greatly appreciate his assistance in the observation of this family, whose members, in their manifold phases, offer the most baffling problems to the non-collecting observer.

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MARCH FIELD TRIP will be taken on Sunday, March 13th, to Lake Lagunitas. Purchase return tickets for Ross and take Sausalito ferry leaving San Francisco at 8:45 A. M. Bring lunch and canteens or cups.

This is a walk of about eight miles, up the canyon, around the lake, and back to Ross. In event of rain preventing the trip, it will be taken the following Sunday. Leader, Mr. Harold E. Hansen.

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE FEBRUARY MEETING: The forty-ninth regular meeting of the Association was held on February 10th, in the Ferry Building, with Vice-President Marsh in the chair; Mr. C. B. Lastreto acting as Recording Secretary; twenty-nine members and seven guests in attendance.

The election of officers and directors for 1921, postponed from the January meeting, resulted as follows:

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| President | A. S. Kibbe |
| First Vice-President | C. R. Thomas |
| Second Vice-President | G. T. Marsh |
| Recording Secretary | Mrs. C. R. Smith |
| Corresponding Secretary | C. B. Lastreto |
| Treasurer | Miss E. F. Griffin |
| Director | C. R. Smith |
| Director | Miss S. E. King |
| Director | Miss Isabelle Ames |

Following the election came the lecture of the evening, in which Mr. H. S. Swarth of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Honorary President of the Association, entertained the members with an array of "Fables and Fallacies of Ornithology," of which an account is attempted hereinafter.

The Board of Directors convened after the conclusion of the lecture and the following new members were elected: Miss Hilda M. Baily, San Francisco; Miss Gertrude Vandervoort, Oakland; Mr. T. C. Campbell, Alderpoint, Humboldt Co., Calif.

## FABLES AND FALLACIES OF ORNITHOLOGY

It is greatly regretted that we can do no more than present a brief summary of the matters touched upon by Mr. Swarth in his very entertaining presentation of this subject.

Perhaps the most ludicrous of the fables cited has been perpetuated in the name of the Barnacle Goose, (branta leucopsis), which perfectly good goose received its name from the conception that it was a development from the common barnacle. Still another had to deal with the way of a road-runner with a snake, wherein the bird was rumored to surround a snake with a ring of cactus before attacking it; when the snake was adequately hampered by the cactus, the road-runner would proceed to despatch it.

The migration of birds, mysterious and inexplicable in so many of its phases, naturally offered a fertile field to the imagination. Sympathy with the weaker individuals led to the theory that the larger birds would carry smaller ones in migrating, while some genius announced that waders would tuck odds and ends of shell fish under their wings to furnish lunches en route when food could not be gathered in the ordinary manner.

From fables, pure and simple, one passes gradually into the realm of errors due to faulty observation or defective methods of estimate or measurement or to conclusions that were not justified by the premises. The Quinary System devised by Swainson had considerable vogue in Europe. This was based upon the theory that all species were grouped in fives. If anywhere there were found a bird which bore no conceivable relation to any other known bird, this was merely due to the fact that the other four birds of its series had not yet been discovered! While arguments over classification are well nigh endless, this particular fallacy was not very difficult to eliminate.

Birds differing greatly in the two sexes have sometimes caused errors in classification which have persisted for considerable periods. A prominent example is the Williamson sapsucker. The two sexes of this bird were at first observed separately and considered of different species, until they were discovered keeping house together.

The red-tail and Swainson hawks, with their manifold phases, have given much trouble to ornithologists, and several different species of hawk have been described which were ultimately referred to one or the other of these two species.

Young birds have been the source of many errors made by describing them as separate species, before their life histories had been adequately determined. The staining of plumage, either temporary or permanent, has led to many similar errors. Birds living in cities or industrial centers become so stained with soot as to mislead the observer.

Birds occurring in summer away from their breeding habitat have caused many mistakes in descriptions of breeding ranges. One prominent local example is furnished by the Allen and rufous hummers. The rufus hummer is common in migration throughout the whole length of the State and is often to be observed during May, June or July, yet there is no authentic record of its breeding in the State, notwithstanding the persistence of rumors to such effect. Similarly rumors persist of the breeding of the Allen hummer in Washington and British Columbia.

Many waders and ducks are likewise found during what is thought to be their breeding season, far from where they actually breed, and nothing but the utmost care will prevent errors in deduction from such facts. Apart from birds which have bred elsewhere and are merely passing a portion of their migrating period in a locality which attracts them, there is always a certain proportion of birds of any species that does not breed in any given season.

The large-billed sparrow and the white cheeked goose are periodically reported to have nested in California, but no one has yet been able to prove such occurrences. There are many people alive who feel sure that the black swift nests in buildings, but it simply is not done. The passenger pigeon comes to life regularly and the band-tailed pigeon carries its eggs around with it, if one cares to believe these rumors.

In addition to mistakes that have been corrected and mistakes that are so deeply seated as to defy complete elimination, there are many questions in dispute, to which a decisive solution has not yet been reached. Among these may be cited the status to be accorded to Cory's Least Bittern and to the so-called great white heron. Are they separate species or merely sports from familiar established species? Where does the chimney swift spend its winters? We do not yet know, but many theories have been advanced. Do the turkey vultures detect their food sources by sight or scent, or both? This problem has been argued at length, but thus far nothing better than a Scotch verdict has been reached.

The relationship between red-shafted and yellow-shafted flickers is not yet determined nor are the relations of red-breasted to yellow-bellied sapsuckers yet satisfactorily defined.

Mr. Swarth commented upon the ambiguity of the term "rare" as commonly employed. To most people, the horned owl is a familiar bird, and the elf owl would be unknown and consequently considered rare. Yet in its proper habitat, the little elf owl is common and is present in large numbers, while the great horned owl, though far more widely distributed, occurs nowhere in numbers, and in comparison might with reason be considered the rarer of the two.

The introduction of high-speed vehicles has afforded a means through which we shall be able to revise many conceptions of the velocity and height of flight of birds. Already the automobile has shown that meadow larks and road-runners are rather slow travelers and some observations have been recorded from aeroplanes.

As a foil to the popular criticism of scientific nomenclature, a number of popular names were cited, the most aggravating example being that of "Wilson's Little Yellow Black-capped Flycatching Wood Warbler."

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## FIELD TRIPS FOR 1921

The Outing Committee has developed a schedule for the various trips to be taken during the coming year, and leaders have been assigned, thus:

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| April | Niles Canyon | Mr. Smith |
| May | Lafayette | Miss Griffin |
| June | Claremont Canyon | Miss Applegarth |
| July | Big Lagoon | Mr. George Wright |
| August | Fairfax Cascades | Mr. Kibbe |
| September | Baumberg | Mrs. Kelly |
| October | Lake Merced | Mr. Thomas |
| November | U. C. Campus | Miss King |
| December | Golden Gate Park | Miss Gunn |
| January | Lake Merritt | Mrs. Kibbe |

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## RUBY CROWNED KINGLET AS A SONGSTER

One of the remarkable things about the Ruby-crown is its extraordinary powers of song. It is really surprising that such a tiny creature should be capable of the strong and sustained notes it utters when in full song. The lower larynx, the sound-producing organ, is not much bigger than a good-sized pin's head, and the muscles that move it are almost microscopic shreds

of flesh. If the strength of the human voice were in the same proportion to the size of the larynx, we could converse with ease at a distance of a mile or more. The kinglet's exquisite vocalization defies description; we can only speak, in general terms, of the power, purity and volume of the notes, their faultless modulation and long continuance. Many doubtless have listened to this music without suspecting that the author was the diminutive Ruby-crown, with whose commonplace utterance, the slender, wiry, "tsip," they were already familiar. Such was once the case even with Audubon, who pays a heartfelt tribute to the accomplished little vocalist, and says further, "When I tell you that its song is fully as sonorous as that of the canary bird, and much richer, I do not come up to the truth, for it is not only as powerful and clear, but much more varied and pleasing."—Dr. Elliott Coues, 1878.

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FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP was taken on Sunday, February 13th, to the Buriburi Ridge and the beautiful valley running from San Andreas to Crystal Springs Lakes. Leaving the bus line at Easton Drive, the party traversed the drive and private roads to the top of the ridge; lunch was eaten in a sheltered spot near the wooden conduit; thence down to the road and along the upper reaches of Crystal Springs Lake for two or three miles; after this the ridge was climbed again and a way found down the slopes through Hillsborough to the highway a mile or two southerly from the point of starting.

The day was rather windy and somewhat sprinkly and in no wise favorable for bird study, but this was the Association's first cross-country trip into San Mateo County and it was voted an entire success. Including some six water birds seen by the East Bay contingent, the following birds were encountered:

Western grebe; glaucous-winged, western, California and Bonaparte gulls; great blue heron, lesser scaup, coot, kildeer and California quail; sharp-shinned, red-tail and sparrow hawks; California woodpecker, red-shafted flicker, Anna and Allen hummers; Say and black phoebes, horned lark, coast and California jays; meadow lark, green-backed goldfinch and pine siskin; Nuttall and golden-crowned sparrows, junco and song sparrow; San Francisco and California towhees, California shrike, Hutton vireo, Audubon warbler and Vigors wren; plain titmouse, chickadee, bush-tit and intermediate wren-tit; ruby-crowned kinglet, dwarf hermit thrush, robin, varied thrush and western bluebird. Forty-four species in all.

Those who dared the vagaries of the weather were the Misses Ames, Applegarth, Burroughs, Cassiday, Chapin, Griffin, Gunn, King, Potter, Sterne; Mrs. Kibbe; Messrs. Kibbe, Leggett, Thomas and George Wright. Guests in attendance were Mrs. H. Bridges, Mrs. Warrington and Mr. F. Bridges. Fifteen members and three guests.

The trip brought out a new feature, for it was discovered that the Audubonites were hikers as well as bird lovers. The members of the party walked twelve miles and were none the worse for wear.

George Wright.


## AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC.

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Meets second Thursday of each month in Lecture Room of California Development Board, Ferry Building, San Francisco.

Every one welcome. Active Membership, $3.00 per year, including Bulletin. Address Bulletin correspondence to President.

Subscription to Bulletin alone, 35c per year. Single copies 5c.